

## A YEAR IN LOSS

A hospital. A funeral home. A cemetery. The places where COVID-19's path of destruction has been the most visible. This issue is dedicated to the 23 Nodaway Countians who the virus killed and the year we all lost to it.



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

Clinton Allen Monuments employee Tyler DeSpain uses a rake to landscape a plot of land at Oak Hill Cemetery March 5 to prepare the area for the installation of a grave marker. Both the monument company and the cemetery have been in service for more than a century.

ANDREW WEGLEY  
Managing Editor | @andrewwegley

Though it's barely a mile north of Maryville's town square, Oak Hill Cemetery is easy to miss. Tucked between Main and Dewey streets, this 28.46-acre property where slimy paved roads dissect small patches of dry grass littered with tombstones is not the kind of graveyard one would consider remarkable. And still, these grounds are hallowed.

On a rare windless day in Maryville, in early spring, this place stood still. Even though a batch of windmills several miles north turned with the breeze, the trees here — all still naked from the season prior — did not sway. Birds chirped in their branches, airplanes flew overhead, but the ground beneath them — just like the bodies buried here — remained lifeless.

This graveyard lacks symmetry, though its residents can't mind. There are grave markers that look similar but not many that look just alike. Amid the trees and yellowed grass, in remission from a harsh winter, there are countless uneven rows of headstones marked with names that feel familiar: "Adams," "Jones," "Watson," "Mother."

Some are taller than several trees on the property, erected high enough to ensure the life beneath them would not go unnoticed. Many are small, modest, admirable — not luxurious, but still striking in their own way. Some are decorated with flowers or flags or ornaments. Most, though, are not — the graves themselves too old to serve as a place of mourning for anyone living. They serve only as a place of rest.

Some gravesites, though, are markedly different. They stand out not because their owner's estate paid a fortune to have a statue erected, nor because they've aged long enough to be abandoned. With their only decor being a layer of golden straw covering fresh dirt nearby, these graves are notable for a reason more tragic: They are new here.

Two hundred and one Nodaway County residents died last year — an increase of 23 from 2019, one that can largely be attributed to the deadly, novel coronavirus. COVID-19 killed 20 Nodaway Countians in 2020, and it's taken the lives of three more in the three

## Twelve months after first upending daily life, virus leaves despair in wake

months since. There are five cemeteries in Maryville alone, meaning most of those victims ended up elsewhere, buried in St. Mary's or St. Pat's or Memorial Gardens, or somewhere further from this city-owned plot amid a vast, rural county — perhaps somewhere closer to home.

But some of them, undoubtedly, have been memorialized here at Oak Hill, where the cemetery's sexton, Terry Sloniker, digs their graves, keeps the grounds and would prefer not to talk about COVID-19. A graying and unimposing man, Sloniker politely but firmly declined an interview request after I'd found him on a Friday morning in the one place where it makes sense to look for a cemetery's sexton: among the headstones at Oak Hill.

When Sloniker and I spoke, as he dredged straw over a fresh grave a few hundred yards away from the property's main entrance, 352 days had passed since the coronavirus killed its first victim in Missouri, a Boone County man in his 60s. It had been 197 days since the first Nodaway Countian died of COVID-19 in late August, a woman in her 80s who had been hospitalized with the virus. In a year full of loss, Sloniker has had a front row seat to the toll it has taken, the graves it has required, the mourning left unfinished, the lives it leaves behind. But, in his telling, he has no story to tell.

"I don't know why people die," he told me amid a graveyard mostly void of the living, but indeed full of life. "I just bury them."

Barb Mullock knows why people die. An infection prevention specialist and registered nurse who has served for 34 years at the hospital now known as Mosaic Medical Center - Maryville, Mullock has been a step behind the front lines for the last 12 months. And while she is sure that she could not compete in a long-distance race — "I have not one athletic cell in my body," she said — Mullock has been running

a sort of marathon since March of last year, racing against a deadly virus aided by individualism, irresponsibility and misinformationists who seem to be rooting against the health care community, rooting against Mullock.

After a year of blight within hospital walls and outside of them, it's not the death toll that bothers Mullock the most. There have been long, hard days at Mosaic, to be sure. And there have been several COVID-19 deaths in Maryville — though most take place elsewhere within Mosaic Life Care's system. But what seems to trouble Mullock the most — what has kept her off social media and what she fumed

it's blue and red; it's not just one ideology over another. Health care should have led the way through this pandemic, and instead, politicians have. And that's unfortunate."

The first positive COVID-19 test in Nodaway County did not come until early April, when a female resident in her 50s was diagnosed with the virus and admitted into Mosaic Life Care in St. Joseph, marking COVID-19's official arrival into a jurisdiction that had so far avoided its wrath. But April 2 is not the date that comes to mind for Mullock. Instead, it is March 9, 2020, when Maryville's chief medical center placed its first inpatient under investigation for the virus, 361 days before Mullock recalled to me the specifics of the case that resulted in a negative virus test.

Logistics, back then, were the biggest obstacle in fighting COVID-19. Masks were not yet recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and tests were not yet widely available.



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

Barb Mullock, 54, is a registered nurse and infection prevention expert at Mosaic Medical Center - Maryville. She has worked at the hospital for 34 years, serving for the last 12 months as a COVID-19.

about to me in a conference room at Mosaic's Maryville branch — is the politicalization of a respiratory illness, one that has inexplicably made health care experts into partisan figures and has made the job of Mullock, and every other medical worker in Maryville and across the country, unnecessarily harder.

"They cheer us on, but yet they don't listen to us either," Mullock said of no one in particular but the masses. "They've let their politics get in the way. And again —

Health care providers at Mosaic had to submit paperwork to a state office, which then decided whether a patient under investigation qualified for a coronavirus test. The negative result came back to Mosaic - Maryville on a Sunday evening, Mullock remembered — still more than three weeks until the county would see its first case of the virus.

SEE COVID-19 | A4

## One year ago, the University postponed classes

*A look back at the Missourian's breaking news coverage when the coronavirus took a hold of the Northwest community, marking the start of new normal.*

MISSOURIAN NEWS STAFF  
@TheMissourian

March 11 | 9:16 p.m.

In response to the coronavirus, Northwest will postpone the resumption of in-person classes until March 23.

In a March 11 email message from University President John Jasinski, Northwest students, faculty and staff were told residence halls will open March 15 as originally planned to allow for students to return if needed. Campus Dining will also provide "scaled back operations" the week of March 15 for those living on campus.

Jasinski said the postponing of classes comes by heeding the recommendations of public health organizations.

"This is truly a unique situation that, as we have seen, is evolving in unpredictable ways," Jasinski said in a University press release. "As Bearcats, we will continue to adapt."

The campus will remain open and operational the week of March 15, as faculty and staff are expected to report to campus as scheduled.

Northwest Athletics has suspended ticket sales for the 2020 NCAA Division II Central Region men's basketball tournament after a statement March 11 from NCAA President Mark Emmert regarding the coronavirus.

The University published a webpage for COVID-19 response updates as they come, and advise keeping up on latest national updates, as well as checking the University calendar for changes and cancellations.

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# Pandemic altered Diversity office’s plans

NATHAN ENGLISH  
Reporter | @nathan\_english

Northwest students’ education was still mostly unaffected by COVID-19 Feb. 23, 2020, when Ahmaud Arbery was shot and killed while on a run in a Georgia suburb. Students were in the midst of their extended spring break March 13, 2020, when Breonna Taylor was killed by police officers during a raid of her Kentucky apartment. Students had been finished with online finals for three weeks May 25, 2020, when George Floyd was killed after Minneapolis police forces restrained him in response to an allegation Floyd had used counterfeit money.

All of these events and more propelled race to the forefront of the national political climate and turned the Northwest community’s attention toward the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

N’ninah Freelon, a diversity coordinator for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, was still training for her new position when the pandemic forced Northwest to cancel in-person classes and move completely virtual in March 2020.

“I just thought it was going to be something quick. I did not think it would be a yearlong thing,” Freelon said.

Meanwhile, Associate Provost of Diversity and Inclusion Justin Mallett was in meetings with Northwest leadership to “gauge the impact” of COVID-19 and plan for the DI office to host virtual events through the end of the semester and into the summer.

Just days after Floyd’s death, a video surfaced on social media of an apparent mocking of his death by two Lee’s Summit

High School graduates, one of whom was set to attend Northwest in the fall.

This video and Northwest’s response led to various social media posts across many platforms under the hashtags #ICantBreathe-atNWMSU and #blackatNWM-SU, among others, that coincided with local Black Lives Matter protests. These posts came from current students, former students and others in the Northwest community detailing incidents of racism and microaggressions at the University.

One student said they had heard their professor say they “missed white supremacy.” Another had seen signs with racial slurs on someone’s dorm door. One former professor said they decided to leave the University because of constant microaggressions; another had overheard colleagues spouting racial epithets with no repercussions. “I don’t think anything that was written on social media shocked us,” Mallett said. “As we read it we basically said, ‘Yup, we remember that situation. Yup, we remember that situation.’”

Many of the posts reminded Freelon of incidents she experienced as a Black female at Northwest. It was only six months prior that Freelon had been in the shoes of the students who had experienced racism at Northwest as she was finishing up her undergraduate degree. Those social posts really hit home, she said.

The stories on social media placed a spotlight on the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and allowed them to shine a light on the issues marginalized students face on campus and open a dialogue with the administration on how they were able



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN  
**Hundreds of protesters at the Nodaway County Courthouse joined thousands across the country June 6, 2020, to protest police brutality and the death of George Floyd. At the protest, many connected to Northwest spoke out about racism they saw or experienced on campus. These events, along with social media posts, placed a spotlight on the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and renewed the push to make Northwest a safe place for underrepresented groups.**

to address the problem.

As the light was focused on them, Freelon, Mallett and the rest of the DI office started getting to work. As a diversity coordinator, Freelon deals mainly in programming. She started a book club swiftly after the wave of social posts in order to foster more discussions on race in America.

Freelon also spoke before the President’s Advisory Council on Discrimination, not only speaking of her concerns as a diversity coordinator but also her concerns as a Black woman in the community.

Freelon described the spotlight as both a positive and a negative.

“It is kind of a slap in the face that something huge has to happen

for people to take action,” Freelon said of the increased attention.

Students, including Freelon herself, have been facing these issues of discrimination and bias for years, she said, and it never felt like it was a priority for anyone to do anything about it until the summer of 2020.

Numerous entities reached out to the DI office with plans on how they would be proceeding toward the goal of making Northwest more equitable. Mallett wanted to make sure everyone was on the same page.

“The one thing about attacking issues of race is that if you try to go about this by yourself, you will never accomplish anything,” Mallett said.

The reason many students felt

like nothing had been done was not necessarily due to a lack of investigation into the microaggressions and racial bias faced on campus, Mallett said. Many of the incidents did not rise to the level of a Title VI violation.

For an incident to rise to the level of a Title VI violation, the discrimination and bias have to be targeted. A person on campus yelling a racial epithet at the bell tower without targeting a particular person or group of people would not be considered a Title VI violation, Mallett said.

FULL STORY ONLINE:  
**NWMISSOURINEWS.COM**

# Face-covering ordinance proved divisive measure

KENDRICK CALFEE  
News Editor | @twitterhandle

In the first week of Introduction to American Government and Politics, Northwest students hear a lecture describing foundations of society. They learn how governments are in place for some sense of order or protection. Classmates discuss the role of government in society — to what extent control is necessary, or to what extent it is overbearing.

Often in these discussions, the words of German novelist Thomas Mann come into play. “Everything is political.”

Mann said that in the 1920s, but it holds merit today. It’s a statement that, perhaps, Maryville’s City Council experienced all too well

this past year.

Councilman Matt Johnson teaches in the same department under which the Introduction to American Government and Politics class is held. While he doesn’t teach that particular class, he is familiar with the terminology; he is familiar with the outcomes.

“The mask thing became such a bigger issue than just the mask thing,” Johnson said.

A year ago this week, Maryville began to take the novel coronavirus a little more seriously.

Northwest sent its students home for spring break, surrounding towns were seeing case counts rising and the global death toll was climbing faster than any health official could

have imagined.

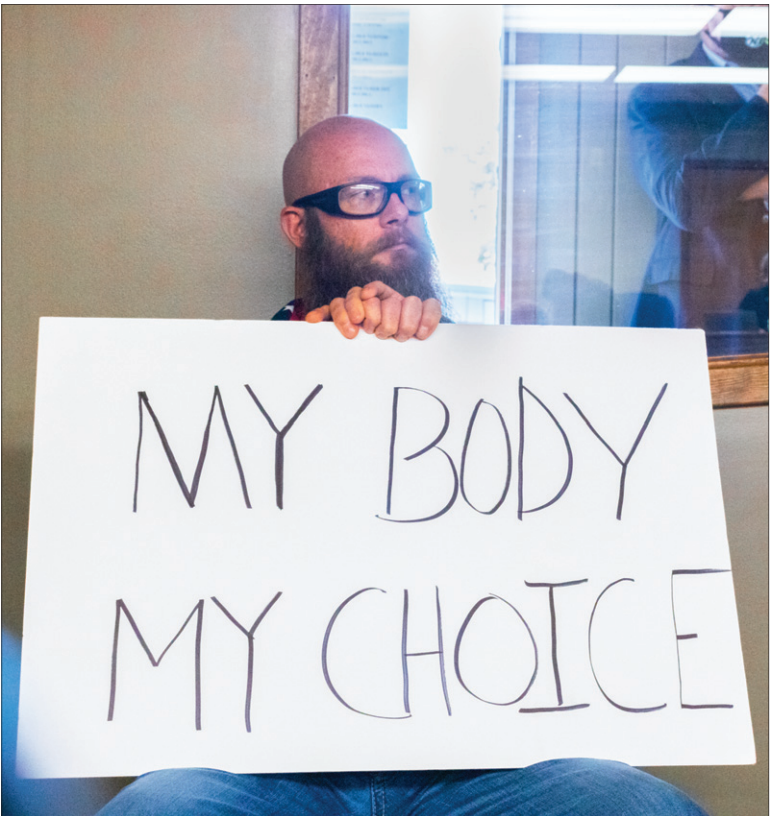
An aggressive approach seemed necessary, but information was coming in quicker than it could be processed by local health officials or anyone on the City Council.

“The amount of information that was coming into us was massive,” Johnson said. “What made the most sense to me was to focus on the individuals that have the best understanding of health needs of this community.”

Eventually, health guidance was more sound. Experts began to agree on what mitigation strategies were necessary, and Johnson, with the rest of Maryville’s City Council, turned to Mosaic Medical Center - Maryville and the Nodaway County Health Department.

Their guidance, along with what was being given from the state and national level, eventually led to a face-covering mandate. On that warm July evening, Maryville’s City Council passed an ordinance that fueled a polarized community. An amplified outcry followed.

From then on, people residing in Maryville, and even some who don’t, began flocking to meetings to speak in approval or disapproval of the ordinance. A global pandemic polarized by talking heads and opinion programs trickled down into the local community, forcing



KENDRICK CALFEE | NW MISSOURIAN  
**A Maryville resident holds a silent protest at the July 22, 2020, Maryville City Council meeting. The other side of his sign pictured above read, “We will not comply.”**

health officials into uncomfortable positions among their peers.

While some concerns were heard and taken into consideration — like how gathering limits would affect local businesses — others reflected opinions different from local health officials, like the efficiency of masks, and the Council made note of it.

Subsequent City Council meetings got longer. People talked over

one another and the Council, even in meetings without scheduled public comment sections. Health officials attended for presentations, and when they were not available, they sent in local COVID-19 statistics and recommendations based on them.

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# Mental health among top local issues

County works around barriers the pandemic built, telehealth appointments aid counseling

MADELINE MAPES Assistant News Editor | @MadelineDMapes

The pandemic has warped peoples’ lives across the world to the point that it is affecting their mental health, which can be seen in Nodaway County where mental health is among the highest medical needs in the county. The average share of adults showing symptoms of anxiety and depression has gone from 11% during a six-month period from January 2019 to June 2019 to 41.1% in January 2020.

College-aged students are no exception to this increase during COVID-19. According to Active Minds, a campus organization supporting mental health awareness, 20% of students said their mental health has worsened significantly during the pandemic.

Licensed Professional Counselor at the Wellness Center Bridget Clark said she began her position at Northwest Feb. 1. Although she was not present when the University moved to remote learning last spring, she had heard talk among her colleagues about mental health prior to the pandemic on campus.

“Busy, and from what I have heard from my colleagues that it has always been busy,” Clark said.

Clark said she has seen that the



JOSLIN WYATT | NW MISSOURIAN

Northwest clinical counselor Bridget Clark sits in front of the Northwest wellness wheel in the Wellness Center March 5. Students can access online mental health resources anytime on the Northwest Missouri State University’s Wellness Center page.

pandemic has affected students’ mental health, but since the Wellness Center’s counseling services have moved to telehealth or online formats of meeting for counseling sessions, cancellation rates for counseling have decreased. This means fewer students are canceling their scheduled sessions.

In an email to The Missourian, Assistant Director of Wellness Services Evan Rand said the no-show rate for counseling visits for the fall 2019 semester was 9.33% and the cancellation rate was 16.72%.

With telehealth, the no-show rate for the fall 2020 semester was 10.56% and the cancellation rate was 9.75%.

Clark said that she and her colleagues were not sure what the correlation between telehealth and increase show rates were, but they considered a few possibilities.

Clark said that virtual appointments are easy to access and provide more flexibility when scheduling. She also noted that there is a bit of an anxiety when showing up to an in-person counseling session.

According to the CDC, telehealth allowed for the decrease of patient foot traffic in clinics, which reduced social distancing issues and exposure. It also allowed for patients who were reluctant to seek in-person care, were not capable of attending in-person appointments or were considered high-risk of COVID-19 to make their appointments.

Clark said that she believes there has been a decrease in stigmas relating to mental health and that people are becoming more aware of the signs in themselves.

Vice President of Northwest’s Active Minds Lara Watson said she

has had friends come to her about their own mental health struggles.

Watson said one of her friends, who she described as a happy introvert, had noticed some changes in his mental health throughout the pandemic. He began to feel lonely at times, which was something that used to not bother him so much.

“He could not explain to himself, ‘Why?’” Watson said. “That’s your mental health, my friend.”

She noted that her friend got to the point that he felt so lonely at times that he did not want to do anything.

Clark said that isolation from others has been a key factor in an increase in mental health issues.

Health Affairs referenced two surveys done by Cigna — one in 2018 and another in 2020 — showing that loneliness in Americans increased 14% in those two years.

Clark noted that although the Wellness Center is not taking offering in-person counseling appointments, if a student feels that they are in crisis, the Wellness Center has a triage service for walk-ins if needed.

She said that she and her colleagues were shocked with how applicable telehealth was to counseling services. Clark said that she did not feel like she was missing as much as she thought she would during online sessions. In fact, she said she noticed that holding virtual meetings has allowed her to gain more knowledge about her patients.

“I also think that there is another level of transparency that happens with telehealth,” Clark said. “I get to see students in their home environment, and so, I can see different aspects of a person that I normally wouldn’t.”

During these appointments, patients can now fill out forms on the computer with their counselor, go over coping strategies and go over online tools for when students are not able to book an appointment. The Wellness Center’s website provides resources for one’s well-being in a variety of different aspects. These topics range from substance abuse to grief to mental health to ADHD.

The Wellness Center’s counseling services also provides Therapy Assistance Online (TAO) for those who do not want to attend counseling sessions.

Director of St. Francis Foundation Megan Jennings said Mosaic Medical Center - Maryville is also providing telehealth options for patients, along with in-person sessions.

FULL STORY ONLINE: NWMISSOURI NEWS.COM



ADDALYNN BRADBURY | NW MISSOURIAN

Erika Lees, assistant director of the International Involvement Center, points toward a map to show where Northwest international students are from. Lees has since helped to create alternative learning situations for students that were not able to come to Northwest due to the pandemic.

# International student enrollment holds strong through pandemic

SYDNEY LOWRY News Reporter | @sidney\_lowry

After a year of the world being shut down, borders closing and travel restrictions, Northwest international students and the International Involvement Center have been trying to work around the limitations placed on them by the pandemic.

When these changes were put in place, international students had to overcome multiple obstacles when it came to either going home or getting back into America.

Some travel was completely restricted for certain countries; the borders were closed not allowing students to travel home for breaks off from school forcing them to

stay at Northwest while campus was closed.

For others, they were able to get home, but getting back to Northwest came with a different set of challenges like requiring a quarantine period or possibly renewing a visa.

Getting a visa during a pandemic is another problem of its own. Students have to contact U.S. embassies, and many of them were closed due to the prohibition of travel to other countries.

Erika Lees, assistant director of the International Involvement Center, said that some embassies have started to open again, but many have not reopened for student visas.

“Some of them have started to open in certain cases, but they

may just be for emergencies,” Lees said. “Some may be doing some student visas. India did quite a few, and we were able to get a good amount of Indian students this past spring.”

Despite obtaining a visa, there is still a possibility that students wouldn’t be able to travel to Northwest depending on what country they are from.

“Some countries like Brazil and China, even if students do have a visa, they can’t travel between their country and the United States,” Lees said. “That’s another barrier to students coming here.”

FULL STORY ONLINE: NWMISSOURI NEWS.COM

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# County senior center adapts to coronavirus effects

WESLEY MILLER  
News Reporter I @wesleymiller360

Last year in the middle of March, the Nodaway County Senior Center remained open, and a few regulars seemed to have a lack of fear of COVID-19 despite the rapid spread of the coronavirus. As COVID-19 continues to impact everyone’s lives, some challenges have arisen for the senior center.

The senior center is a place where the senior citizens can gather for lunch; the senior center does offer home-delivered meals, too. Aside from meals, the senior center offers activities for the people who come such as cards, a pool table and even Tai Chi on Tuesdays.

For a facility where funding has already been in bad shape, problems over the course of the pandemic year didn’t help. The center’s costs increased nearly \$32,000 in 2020 alone, which Amie Firavich, administrator for the Nodaway County Senior Center, said was largely due to the increased prices of goods and the decrease of people who utilize the center’s services.

Raw food costs jumped up to \$8,000, and her paper products’ costs went up to \$5,000.

“You always expect jumps every year, but it’s never jumped up by that much,” Firavich said.

She said this is the biggest increase in expenses in her 14 years working at the senior center.

The money had been an obstacle before, as an \$80,000 deficit stacked up before the pandemic’s impact. But now with over \$30,000 added to it — increasing expenses to \$110,000 — Firavich said she finds herself asking, “Where is the money going to come from?”

Firavich said the organization has been applying for grants and hopes to get them to help with the incredible cost of the year.

“But, you know, everyone else is fighting for the same money, too,” Firavich said.

Firavich said that in addition to grants, the center has been trying to make the community aware of the large deficit in money and has been accepting donations.

“We’re trying to save money obviously wherever we can without affecting the quality of the food we serve,” Firavich said.

She said they’ve always ran with minimum employees, and they can’t lay anyone off. She said because they rely on so many volunteers, laying people off is unacceptable.

After being forced to close for a brief time this summer, Firavich, led the organization’s approach to

food delivery.

At the time, there were 90 individuals who were served daily, Monday-Friday through six separate routes of food delivery. However, there was a short period of time in June where those who were being served by the senior center had to go through a drive-thru to get their daily lunches.

Now, eight months after they reopened their doors, the concern for safety has not changed for Firavich, who watches diligently over the age group with the highest risk of contracting COVID-19.

“We have been sanitizing, sanitizing, sanitizing,” Firavich said as she was preparing for the lunch hour in her office.

Across the facility, sanitizer is made available for guests, and everything has been removed from tables aside from napkins.

“All the condiments are handed out by the staff, rather than them getting them individually,” Firavich said.

She said they use caution as much as they can to better ensure the safety of the staff, the senior citizens and herself.

When COVID-19 first hit the U.S., Firavich said she was, of course, worried, especially because of the age group she works with. But now, with more knowledge on the virus and vaccination events happening almost every week, she said she is starting to worry less.

“We’ve all learned a little bit more about it, so I’m not as worried as I was before,” Firavich said. “I still believe, though, that the vaccine isn’t going to protect everyone, so we still have to use common sense and practice personal hygiene.”

As far as those who come in now, Firavich said she hasn’t had any problem with enforcing the masks and social distancing. She said there are still a few who receive delivered meals, but at the beginning of March, she said they see around 40 people come into the center every day.

Dick Logan, who has been coming to the senior center for 10 1/2 years, said he has spent a lot of time at home in the past year.

“I went to Burny’s last weekend, and that was the first time I’ve been there since last July,” Logan said.

However, Logan said he wasn’t impressed with how the bar handled the face-covering mandate.

“They weren’t even trying to enforce the mask mandate,” Logan said.

While he wasn’t impressed with his trip to Burny’s, Logan said he was impressed with how the vacci-



ADDALYNN BRADBURY | NW MISSOURIAN

**Amie Firavich, administrator for the Nodaway County Senior Center, stands to watch Connie McGinness, treasurer of the Nodaway County Senior Citizens Senate Board, play cards with a group of friends in the lunchroom of the senior center. The senior center offers food and activities for the people who come such as cards, a pool table and even Tai Chi on Tuesdays.**

nation events were organized during his two shots at the Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse.

Within the year, Logan said his thoughts of the virus never changed.

“I believe in science, and science tells me it’s dangerous,” Logan said.

Logan also had words for those who would rather choose not to receive the vaccine.

“Anybody who does not get a shot is an idiot,” Logan said. “It’s just silly not to.”

Connie McGinness, treasurer of the Nodaway County Senior Citizens Senate Board, and her family have been very involved with Northwest and Maryville over the years. McGinness said her husband, two daughters and even some grandchildren have attended Northwest.

Her experience throughout the coronavirus pandemic was similar to many in that lunchroom.

“I did a lot of picking up groceries,” McGinness said.

These days, though, she said she shops in the early mornings to avoid the crowds.

McGinness, who has received her first vaccination, said she believed in the virus when it first reached the United States.

“It just spread so fast,” McGinness said.

McGinness shared a common sadness with grandmothers across

the world during the pandemic. With her family including 12 grandchildren — two of which were infected with the coronavirus — and seven great-grandchildren, getting together was nearly impossible.

“I’m usually the one who motivates the others to get together for Christmas, but we weren’t able to this past year,” McGinness said. “We do plan on seeing each other for Easter, though.”

As they sat at a table together for lunch at the senior center, Sandra Stiens and Dorothy Schafer talked about their lives in the “new normal.”

Stiens and Schafer said they had to use the drive-thru for their meals from the senior center.

Stiens, a regular since 2008, said at the beginning of the lockdowns she had her daughter shop for her. Schafer, who has gone to or served the Nodaway County Senior Center for 38 years, had her own method of pre-ordering her groceries.

Stiens and Schafer each have received at least one dose of the vaccination.

“I think shots will be a world of difference,” Stiens said. “And more people are coming back because of the shots.”

Stiens and Schafer both agreed that the virus was never a thing to disregard, and they believed in its

dangers from the beginning.

“I never thought it was blown out of proportion,” Stiens said.

Stiens said that most of her family even contracted the virus, and to her, it was never a question of the virus’s legitimacy.

Schafer said she was fortunate because she lives outside of town and didn’t have to worry about a job which helped allow her to be more socially distant. She said all of her family lived close, and she didn’t have to worry about traveling too much to see them.

“I didn’t really have any place to be,” Schafer said.

Now, in early March 2021, senior center regulars like Stiens and Schafer are greeted by signs requesting visitors to be safe, pamphlets on the front desk advertising counseling for anyone experiencing mental health issues and masks being worn by the people inside, except for when eating.

As Firavich and her frequenters continue to adapt to the coronavirus and its struggles, the senior center expects more people to return as more vaccines are administered, with hopes of returning to “normal” once again.

“They’re ready to move forward,” Firavich said. “They’ve been isolated, and now, they’re ready to go.”

## COVID-19 CONTINUED FROM A1

On the day we spoke in early March, it had been two weeks since she had received her second dose of the coronavirus vaccine. She was, at last, fully inoculated.

The marathon, it seems, is nearing completion — a statement that is simultaneously exultant and troubling. Competitors, after running 26.2 miles, tend to collapse. This reality is what has Mullock worried, even as the virus begins its retreat.

There is an adjustment coming soon for a nation full of healthcare workers who have been the last 12 months on or near the frontlines in a fight against a deadly virus. There will be a slowdown, one that will feel wholly unfamiliar. Mullock worries most about younger nurses who might not be equipped to handle the switch, who may have been irreparably scarred by this pandemic. But even for staffers as seasoned as Mullock, there is a reckoning on the horizon — one that will find a field of exhausted heroes shortly after their adrenaline has waned, their runner’s high has worn.

“I do think — I’m sure if we’re all honest, we’ve thought that at one point or another, ‘Is it really worth the struggle?’” said Mullock, who keeps her salt-and-pepper hair trimmed short. “But we have to. For our communities, for our people, our coworkers here — you have to just keep going on.”

Serving most often a step behind her frontline colleagues, Mullock has been a sort of counselor to those working directly with COVID-19 cases at Mosaic - Maryville. She has been a witness to the isolation the virus causes, leaving patients to recover — or not — separated from those closest to them. Mullock is a lifeline to colleagues who themselves are a lifeline to patients otherwise sequestered from the outside world.

Though she has largely been a layer removed from the trenches, Mullock has not been acquit-

ted from the worst of the virus’s outcomes. She tested positive for the virus herself in December. She watched a former colleague die of it. She watched it kill her uncle, too.

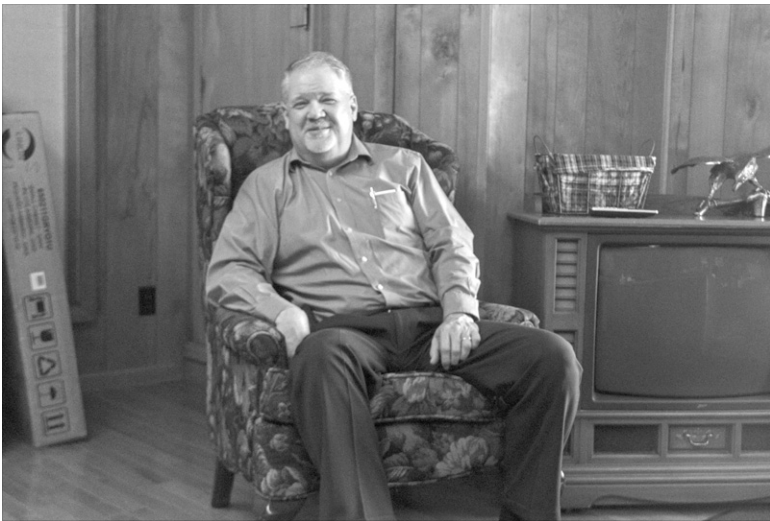
His death was months ago, and still, it does not feel real to Mullock. She has not traveled to Illinois, where he lived and died, to see him memorialized, to visit with his immediate family, to feel the full weight of his death as mourners are meant to. COVID-19 has brought a year’s worth of loss. But worse, for Mullock, it has left a year’s worth of mourning unfinished.

Marshall Wyatt had already spent close to 30 years working in the hypersensitive business that is funeral directing before he purchased Price Funeral Home in Maryville last July, taking over operations in an aged, hospitable building that seems out of place on the corner of First and Market, a state-of-the-art public safety building sitting one block to the east. The funeral home itself is quiet — almost eerily so. Footsteps echo in the building’s interior, bouncing off walls that have seen and housed more grief than most.

Wyatt joined the staff at Price in 2017 after working for decades in the business in St. Joseph, and in the midst of the single deadliest year in U.S. history, Wyatt bought the 119-year-old business from former owner Richard Dowden, taking over at a time when age-old end-of-life traditions had been upended by a virus responsible for millions of deaths.

Wyatt, an aging man himself, is numb to death. He has consoled countless families facing the worst days and weeks of their lives, charged with burying mothers, fathers, daughters, sons. He has made a living out of loss.

Sitting on a vintage floral sofa in an office with wooden floors and walls, Wyatt described the responsibilities that come with each body that passes through Price Funeral Home. There is an initial inquiry with the family that helps



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

**Marshall Wyatt sits in a retro floral chair in the office at Price Funeral Home, which he purchased in July 2020. Wyatt has worked in the funeral business for close to 30 years, including the last four at Price in Maryville.**

the funeral home chart a path forward. There is a request sent to the state of Missouri seeking permission to perform an embalming, if required. Meetings are conducted. Arrangements are made. An obituary is written. The deceased is prepared. Clergy is contacted. A funeral is held.

“When the service is over and the family comes up and says, ‘Thank you,’” Wyatt said, “You know we’ve done our job. And we’ve done our job well.”

But the job has changed in the last 12 months. It is different now than it was for the first 29 years of Wyatt’s career. City ordinances placed limits on gatherings, and with them, on grief. State guidelines for funeral homes, Wyatt said, played an even bigger role than local governments. And, with or without occupancy limitations in place, mourners have stopped showing up in the numbers that they used to, Wyatt said. People have been slow to risk their own life in order to mourn another.

At Price, the rate of families opting to have their loved ones cremated has risen, in part so relatives extend their time for grieving, delaying the wake of the deceased until gathering is feasible, until mourn-

ing is what it used to be. This worries Wyatt. Price Funeral Home will accommodate the wants and needs of their clients, of course — the home’s owner is not worried about that. His concern lies with the families and what delayed grief might do to them. A further, immeasurable toll the coronavirus might take.

“I think it probably will be more difficult for families, because after the person’s passed, you’re in the mourning process then,” Wyatt said. “And then let’s say six months down the road you’re scheduled to have your loved one’s memorial service; you’re opening up all those wounds that are starting to heal from losing mom or dad. And you’re going back and reliving this whole — the illness, the passing — you’re reliving all of that.”

Still, Wyatt mostly insisted that COVID-19 has not played a starring role in the operations of Price Funeral Home for the last year. The virus has brought hesitancy and delays and a casket shortage, he said, but the 12% increase in deaths in Nodaway County from 2019 to 2020 has not felt palpable to the funeral home director. Before our interview and throughout it, Wyatt was hesitant to give the virus the concession it demands.

But there was a day — sometime in late summer, Wyatt said — when a series of virus-related death calls gave him pause. The staff at Price Funeral Home had heard the horror stories pour in from overwhelmed funeral homes nationally, and as the death toll mounted in Nodaway County, Wyatt and company feared they were next. Three or four or five calls came in, each requiring a different plan, a different obituary, a different funeral. Worry gripped the funeral director. But soon, the phone stopped ringing.

There seems to be a unique sense of urgency with virus-related deaths, one in part due to the isolation that accompanies them. Victims check into a hospital and check out of the world they once knew. By the time they end up in the care of the staff at Price, relatives fixate on efficiency. They are less concerned with the details of the detail-oriented business and more concerned about the timeline. They want to see their mom again, Wyatt said, and as he did the receiver sitting on his office desk rang. He rose from his chair a few steps away and picked up the call.

“Price Funeral Home?” Wyatt said into the telephone, his voice raising in pitch as his sentence went on.

It could have been a hospital administrator or nursing home employee notifying Wyatt of another death, a body in-waiting that would pass through his business. It could have been a family member or friend calling to ask about the next day’s visitation, about a service that would likely have to take place graveside, about another death in a season full of them.

“Hello? This is Price Funeral Home,” he repeated, in a tone so cheerful it sounded nearly unsuitable for a business so grim.

“Hello?” Wyatt said again, before hanging up the phone.

In a year of loss, there was, thankfully, no one on the other side of the line.



OUR VIEW:

# THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

A little under a year ago our editorial team was sitting in the newsroom trying to grasp the gravity of the situation that was unfolding around us.

We had just spent the last week of our extended spring break trying to perform our jobs remotely. We were on our phones and our laptops marking off “COVID-19” stories from a long list on a Google Doc for hours as we tried to piece together what was happening.

We were speaking to Northwest leadership and local officials who were talking of masks, social distancing, flattening the curve and the possible cancellation of in-person classes for the next month. All of these terms are common to us now; we’ve heard them repeated over and over again, but a year ago they were foreign to us.

The thought that our lives would come to a dead standstill and then be restructured around a virus seemed to have more in common with science fiction than reality, but that’s what happened.

We had heard of SARS-CoV-2, more commonly known as COVID-19, prior to it effectively shutting down our normal lives and routines. Some of us had read news stories about the mysterious virus that was ripping its way through the city of Wuhan, China. Others had seen the countless memes made about the random guy who ate a bat and did more to stop China than the U.S. ever had.

As it slowly became clear that this virus was going to affect the U.S., it became associated with swine flu in many of our minds. All of us on the editorial team weren’t even in high school when the H1N1 virus was making headlines. It was certainly serious, but it was brief.

The swine flu seemed to leave with little fanfare, and part of us felt COVID-19 would do the same. That’s why less than a year ago, in the basement of Wells Hall, we were in shock about the situation going on around us.

As we were trying to understand what was happening, so was everyone else in the country. Those in the service industry were being told their place of employment was temporarily closing or shifting formats. Toilet paper was flying off the shelves at an astounding rate, and many debated whether or not it was worth it to risk a supply run at the store.

Suddenly, masks weren’t a fringe fashion choice but an everyday necessity. Jobs were canceling in-person meetings and encouraging their employees to stay home. Parents were struggling to balance their children’s virtual learning schedule, and weddings, concerts and other events seemed to be hanging in the balance.

It seemed every day the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was issuing new guidelines and changing information. We counted heads in the newsroom to make sure we were following the 10-person limit issued by our government.

We still had a job to do, though, so we did it. We went about our — somewhat — normal week. We met and discussed how stories for this week’s paper were going. Our designers sketched out layouts for the special pages while reporters followed up on stories about special City Council meetings and what the Nodaway County Health Department was planning.

We edited stories about the financial impact of the virus and campus shutting down. We struggled to write headlines that filled the space, and we spell-checked pages and taped them to our big whiteboard. Finally, we sent the paper to the printer. There was one problem, though. Nobody was on campus.

Prior to March of 2020, Thursdays were the day our staff would be stationed around campus handing out papers to anyone who would take one, reminding passersby that they are free and the “best way to know what’s going on” at Northwest and the surrounding area.

We have written 354 stories related to COVID-19 since March 2020.

The number of students on campus after the 2020 spring break wouldn’t fill a lecture hall, but we had an idea what we were going to do with the thousands of papers that we were about to print. So, early Thursday morning, we began rolling and bagging papers. The ink stained our hands black as we banded and bagged thousands of papers and placed them in boxes. Then came the fun part; we drove all around Maryville tossing papers into yards.

Our special COVID-19 issue was complete. For the rest of the semester, we had to meet on Zoom and produce our paper virtually.

We looked to the future with cautious optimism as we hoped this “new normal” would end soon. We had heard pundits on news programs and even some medical experts anticipate an end to COVID-19 when the summer months started. We hoped they were right, that we could attend concerts in a sea of people, and we could go to midnight premieres at movie theaters and go on vacations without fear and masks.

Almost a year later, with all this talk about how the world has changed, we are here doing the same thing we were doing last March. We are trying to make a special COVID-19 issue of The Missourian.

We are talking to University leaders and local officials about masks, social distancing and flattening the curve. We are marking “COVID stories” off a long list that is on a whiteboard now rather than a Google Doc. We are writing stories about new CDC guidelines and talking to the health department.

We are editing stories about the financial impact of the virus and photos of places with little to no people. Our designers are sketching out pages for our special issue. We are still struggling to write headlines that fill the space, and we are still taping spell-checked pages to a big whiteboard.

We are trying to limit the number of people in the Wells Hall basement during our meetings, and we are covering City Council meetings and following up on late stories.

We aren’t going around on campus and handing out papers, but we are driving around Maryville and tossing bagged papers into yards.

We are optimistic about the summer and how it could possibly spell the end of COVID-19’s reign of terror on the U.S. We are hoping to attend concerts in packed stadiums, go out to the movies and have every seat in the theater open, and go on vacation without needing to bring a mask.

We are hearing from pundits on news programs and medical experts tell us that we could reach herd immunity by the time the summer months begin.

Some of us have had loved ones pass away from the virus, and others have caught it themselves. We’ve had to spend a large chunk of a semester making virtual papers rather than printing them. We’ve had to host meetings over Zoom and write stories remotely.

We are not unique in any of the effects this pandemic caused us. Millions of Americans lost jobs and loved ones from the pandemic. Many have been and will continue to be working remotely and meeting over Zoom. And many are holding out hope for the summer when perhaps COVID-19 won’t be altering everyone’s lives in a dramatic fashion.

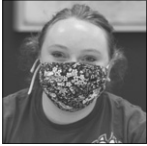
Rescheduled weddings and concerts still seem to hang in the balance, and parents are still trying to figure out how their child’s virtual education works — or if it works at all. Thankfully, there’s plenty of toilet paper.

This last year has certainly changed all of us, but in many aspects, we are the same. In some ways, our editorial team is still sitting in the newsroom trying to grasp the gravity.


YOUR VIEW:

## What’s been the most difficult part of last year for you?


**AMBER MORGANT**  
Senior  
Accounting and  
Agriculture Business




**CHI NWUBA**  
Junior  
Biomedical Sciences




**DEJA LAMB**  
Junior  
Public Relations



**JACOB PICKMAN**  
Sophomore  
Public Relations



**BEN WESTER**  
Junior  
Broadcast  
and Production



“I didn’t opt out of anything, so trying to teach myself everything. The lack of a schedule was the hardest because I thrive on that, and not having it was really hard.”

“The most difficult part has been having to adjust to alternating classes because it’s hard for me to be in class this moment and then online the next.”

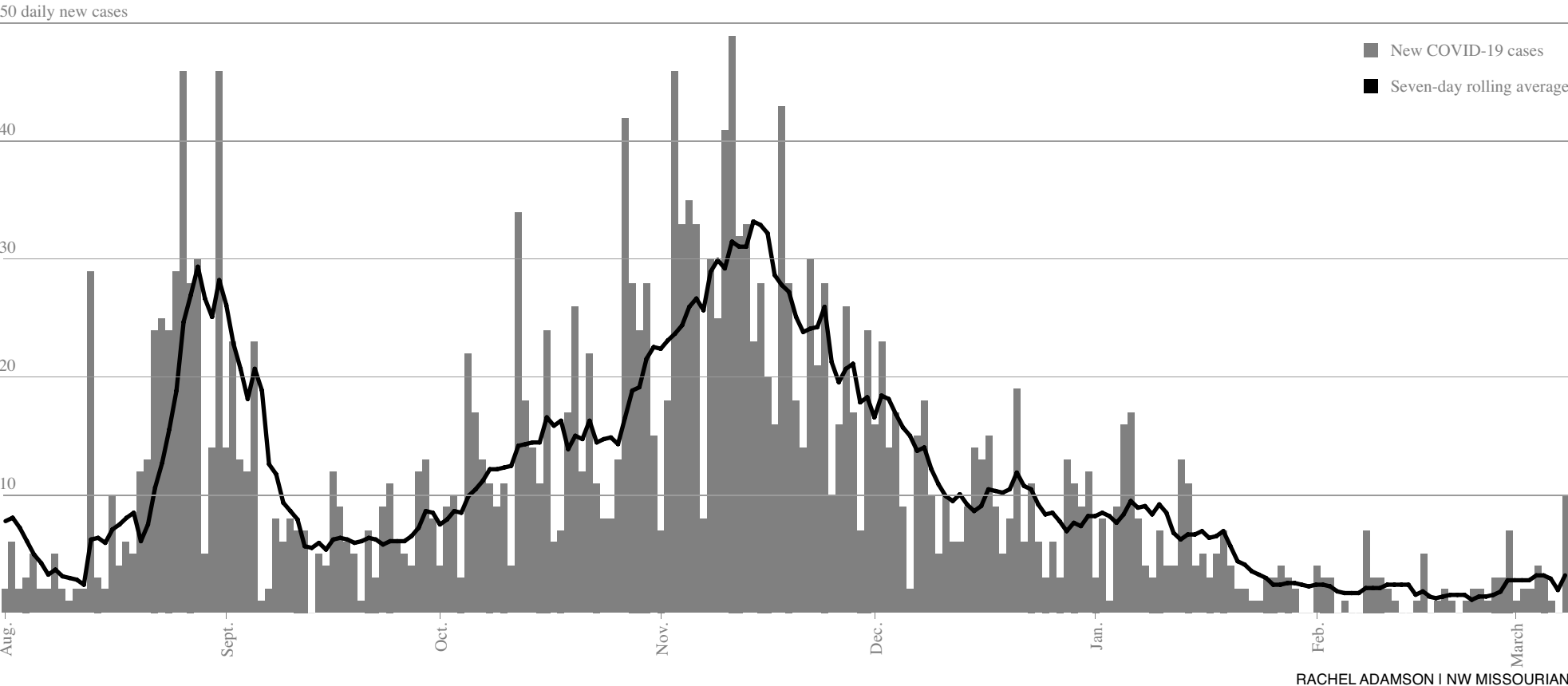
“I think with COVID and the regular school year there has been a lot of burnouts and mental health issues campus-wide for everyone.”

“A lot of our plans have had wrenches thrown in them. Spring break for high school, we were going to go to Colorado, but it never panned out, and spring break for college, we were supposed to go hang out in Florida with our entire family.”

“Obviously everyone is a little more hesitant for going out and wearing masks everywhere. I was always more of a homebody and I kinda stayed home anyways.”



Daily new COVID-19 cases in Nodaway County since August 2020



Vaccines continue to roll into county

MADELINE MAPES  
Assistant News Editor | @MadelineDMapes

Mosaic Medical Center - Maryville received word March 8 from the state that the hospital will receive 1,150 first doses of Pfizer vaccines rather than 300 doses of Moderna vaccines that were originally scheduled to receive. Mosaic - Maryville is also scheduled to obtain roughly 460 second doses of the Moderna vaccine. As vaccines rollout across the nation, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has laid out new guidelines in regard to those who are fully vaccinated.

President of Mosaic - Maryville Nate Blackford and Community Health Nurse Bridget Kenny said the hospital plans to administer 150 of the Pfizer first doses on the upcoming mass vaccination clinic March 10 along with the 460 Moderna second doses. The other 1,000 Pfizer vaccines will be used at the following mass clinic March 15, which is also the day Phase 1B Tier 3 opens.

This tier opens up eligibility to pre-K and K-12 teachers and administration but not higher education professors, staff or faculty. Vice President of Student Affairs Matt Baker said this decision is from the guidance of Gov. Mike Parson and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Phase 1B Tier 3 also opens up eligi-

17.9%

of Nodaway County residents have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

bility to other businesses that keep society functioning. “The entire goal of the vaccination is to get people back to, again, some semblance of normal,” Blackford said.

Parson stated in his press release Feb. 25 that Phase 1B Tier 3 will open up eligibility to roughly 550,000 Missouri residents.

According to the Nodaway County COVID -19 Dashboard, as of March 2, the latest information, there are 23 current cases in the county, four of which are from the University. The total number of cases in the county is 2,580 and the seven-day rolling average is three.

In the past week, many people in Nodaway County are now considered fully vaccinated with both doses administered. According to the Missouri COVID-19 dashboard, 2,641 people in the county have received both doses of

a COVID-19 vaccine.

The CDC put out new guidelines March 8 stating people who are fully vaccinated may gather with other people who have been fully vaccinated in indoor spaces without a mask.

The guidelines also state that people can gather with individuals who are not fully vaccinated without a mask, unless those individuals are considered part of the high-risk category.

Blackford and Kenny both said, as of March 8, that they had not looked at the guidelines due to their recent posting but had seen a story on Becker’s Hospital Review. “The Becker Report is stating that maybe things could — not necessarily get back to normal, but that we could maybe start to do other things with our family members,” Kenny said.

Blackford said Mosaic - Maryville will continue to follow CDC guidelines, even as changes in them come about.

He also said that the hospital’s focus is going to primarily be on administering as many vaccines as they possibly can each week.

According to the Missouri COVID-19 Dashboard, as of March 7, the latest information, Nodaway County has 17.9% of its population vaccinated with at least the first dose.

Kenny and Blackford both urged local residents to sign up for Mosaic - Maryville’s waiting list for a vaccine for the two upcoming vaccine events.

Local businesses fought through virus lockdown

KAILEE FORD  
News Reporter | @kailee\_ford

It’s been a year since the coronavirus pandemic sent the U.S. into lockdown and forced many businesses to close, which Maryville was no stranger to.

Places such as Board Game

Cafe — which had just celebrated its third anniversary —had to temporarily close, leaving owner Scott Copeland to completely change the way he ran his business before reopening. This serves as a testament to foot traffic in local business decreasing

by as much as 60% when the pandemic hit Maryville the hardest.

“We were showing lots of growth and really beginning to do well, and then the virus hit,” Copeland said.

Director of Nodaway County Economic Development Josh McKim said 2020 was a good year for big corporations, such as Walmart and Hy-Vee but a bad year for small businesses.

Last spring, the impact quarantine had on the town was noticeable, with an increase in unemployment, foot traffic for small businesses being down about 40-60% and low sales tax revenue for small businesses.

However, McKim said that things have gotten better, slowly but surely, for small businesses in town.

The holiday season gave businesses a small pickup after months of difficulty getting people to the store, and McKim said the renewal of some Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act funds in December became a small start to getting back to pre-COVID-19 business.

Unemployment is also looking up compared to last year. McKim said that unemployment is much more stabilized but is still a constantly changing number, going from as high as 9.2% last spring to currently being at around 4.2%.

McKim said that foot traffic levels haven’t had any recent changes yet but that he hopes the recent trend with low COVID-19 cases and more vaccinations in the county will bring people into the shops.

Copeland’s cafe closed from April to July last year due to COVID-19 and had mostly functioned as a coffee shop to be sanitary and safe. Copeland opened up the cafe’s game library in August before school started with sanitization efforts put in place.

“We are still holding back on allowing full capacity in the shop, but we’re very optimistic about how the



IZIBEL DOBBS | NW MISSOURIAN

Joel Kosch and Jana Hanson enjoy some coffee and relax while talking business at the Board Game Cafe. The Board Game Cafe celebrated their third anniversary right before they had to close because of the pandemic.

summer and next school year will go,” Copeland said.

Stephanie Campbell, owner of White Elm Mercantile and Blue Willow Boutique and co-owner of soon-to-open Black Pony Brewery, said that one useful tool for small businesses in Maryville has been having an online presence for customers.

Campbell opened White Elm in October in the midst of the pandemic, which she admits, may have seemed a bit odd from a business standpoint.

“We saw an opportunity and took the lessons we learned during the pandemic from Blue Willow and applied them to White Elm,” Campbell said.

Despite the difficult situation the store opened in, Campbell said that having an online presence from the beginning made things a little easier.

The Board Game Cafe added an online shop where you can buy games or coffee. Copeland said that being online has been really helpful during the pandemic.

Although some shops have created an online presence for customers, McKim said that the help isn’t completely making up for the loss of physical customers in the store.

McKim doesn’t have the numbers relating to recent sales tax revenue yet because it’s still too early in the year and can only guess if it’s high, low or the same compared to last year.

Some businesses in Maryville closed permanently, such as the Guys and Dolls Hair Studio and Carson’s Sports Grill.

Despite closures, permanent or temporary, new businesses such as White Elm Mercantile and Black Pony Brewery have found their footing amid the pandemic in Maryville.

Copeland said he hopes the end of the pandemic’s grasp on small business is near and that people should remain vigilant and wear masks when required to.

“We still need to look out for each other — we’re all part of the same community,” Copeland said.

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# Law enforcement adapts to COVID-19

KENDRICK CALFEE  
News Editor | @calfee\_kc

Law enforcement is a profession where constants are necessary. Protocols are in place to ensure chaos can be returned to order and ensure there is a system to fall back on. While the coronavirus pandemic affected operations of Maryville Police Department and the Nodaway County Sheriff's Office, those in positions of duty said they were thankful for protocol — for at least some consistency in a time when the word “consistency” was becoming obsolete.

Over the past year, law enforcement had to adapt to new policing strategies brought on by mitigation efforts. Extra precautions were added to keep officers, deputies, inmates and the community alike, safe from the threat of a deadly virus.

Then, beginning July 2020, local law enforcement was tasked with enforcing a face-covering ordinance, which received mixed feedback from the community.

After a year of policing in a global pandemic, Maryville Police officers Matthew McMillen and John Vaught suited up on a sunny March morning for patrol. Here's what they had to say about the past year:

**Over this past year, how has policing changed?**

“The biggest change that we had was less face-to-face contact,” Vaught said. “With the community-policing-based department that we are, that was kind of challenging. We like to go out and make contact with people, to go out and help people out with stuff that's just not even law enforcement related sometimes. The pandemic made that kind of hard for some of us.”

Vaught said that whenever possible, Maryville Police takes calls for theft or other incidents where evidence isn't pertinent on the phone to limit contact with people who were possibly asymptomatic with COVID-19. With less face-to-face contact, it has been harder to feel involved with the community, he said.

“Community policing is getting to know your community,” Vaught said. “So you get to realize what is going on; it helps you to focus your investigation. But it also helps you



ADDALYNN BRADBURY | NW MISSOURIAN

Maryville Police officers Matthew McMillen and John Vaught fill out reports during an accident between two Northwest students March 9. McMillen and Vaught both said calls involving COVID-19 means wearing personal protective equipment, being extra alert and trying to social distance.

get to know the people. It's a collective mindset. That's harder with (COVID-19).”

**How has the department approached enforcing the city face-covering ordinance?**

“Really, we haven't had a whole lot of problems with it,” Vaught said. “We've had some pushback, but mostly our part was just showing we were on board with it. I don't think people realize how many business checks we've been on since the start of this. Every day we are in several businesses walking around, making contact with people. Most of the time it's just people walking along. They get tired and pull the mask down, but once they're asked, ‘Will you pull your mask up please?’ then they say sorry and pull it back up. That's what most of it has been.”

Even though Maryville Police is making an effort to limit

face-to-face contacts, the department still has to ensure businesses are following the ordinance. A period of enhanced enforcement for the face-covering ordinance, which is ongoing, began in November 2020 when the city's Seventh Emergency Order was passed. As of March 9, the city has logged 660 interactions with individuals at 95 different locations. Maryville Police issued 87 warnings and one citation in relation to the ordinance.

“We've had a few people that just don't believe in it,” Vaught said. “But we haven't had any of those big problems. I think most people realize it's not all about them.”

“Really, we've looked at businesses. So if there is a business that's refusing to go along with it, we would write them a violation of that ordinance,” McMillen said. “We've tried not to go after individuals with it unless they are just be-

ing complete and total jerks.”

**What happens when you go on a call involving someone infected with COVID-19?**

“When COVID first started, and nobody knew anything about it, how bad it was and what it caused, we basically didn't do anything except when you had an emergency where your life's on the line,” McMillen said. “We would handle a lot of simple calls ... traffic stops were almost zero during that time.”

McMillen and Vaught both said calls involving COVID-19 mean wearing personal protective equipment, being extra alert and trying to social distance. Even so, this is a practice the department tries to maintain even when calls involve someone known to not have the virus.

“A lot of times it was hard to tell because some people were telling you, ‘Oh, I've got COVID,’ and trying to do that so they wouldn't get

in trouble in their traffic stop. We had some people like that.”

McMillen was one of at least six Maryville Police officers who became infected with COVID-19. Thankfully, Vaught said, the department performed duties well even with officers out for short periods of time.

**What kind of trends in crime have you observed while on duty amid a pandemic?**

“We actually saw an increase of house parties because instead of kids going to the bars, they were just having parties at their houses,” McMillen said.

McMillen said there wasn't necessarily an enhanced effort to discourage any house parties because of the pandemic, though, since Maryville ordinances don't allow for it.

FULL STORY ONLINE:  
[NWMISSOURINEWS.COM](https://www.nwmissourinews.com)

## Northwest embraced technology, adapted quickly in face of virus

MADLINE MAPES  
Assistant News Editor | @MadelineDMapes

A pandemic-rocked world has changed the way schools function. One of the biggest effects of the pandemic is how students are educated.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as of March 8, the status of most U.S. schools is partially open.

Many schools across the nation closed when the pandemic peaked in the U.S. Some are slowly reopening with different learning models, including Northwest, which opened up the 2020-21 school year with a hybrid model. Provost Jamie Hooyman said the University plans to open next fall with fully in-person classes, as long as the CDC says it is safe to do so, while maintaining COVID-19 mitigation measures if needed.

Professor and Dean of the School of Education Timothy Wall and Hooyman said despite not having in-person interactions, professors have found ways to keep students engaged in online classes, some of which they plan to keep for future teaching, even with the University moving back to fully in-person classes.

Hooyman said when the University moved to remote learning last spring, having classes on Canvas created a foundation for the University to begin the transition to online-only classes.

“So many universities — one, didn't have the platform. ... They were trying to, from the very beginning, trying even how to figure out how to go online,” Hooyman said.

She also said despite that foundation, many professors had to get creative with teaching their classes remotely.

Wall said he has been using Zoom for five years, and in 2017, most of the School of Education's graduate programs were moved to remote learning.

“From that perspective we

lucked out,” Wall said. “We were ahead of the game to move towards asynchronous online and make full use of digital technological spaces.”

He said most undergraduate programs are following the University's hybrid model, depending on classroom size to maintain social distancing along with other mitigation efforts.

Wall said the School of Education aims to use a hands-on approach to teaching, even in a digital environment. He noted different online learning tools such as Google Jamboard and Kahoot have both been engaging activities that he has used in his remote classes.

Wall explained that because of the pandemic, many of the teacher candidates who are working to gain clinic practice in live classrooms, including Horrace Mann and the Leet Center laboratory schools in Brown Hall, have had to change the way they interact with their students as well.

He said the teacher candidates are no longer in the same physical learning space as their students but rather using Zoom and other online outlets to engage with their practicum teachers and the students they are helping teach.

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GABI BROOKS | NW ATHLETICS

Coach Austin Meyer celebrates a basket in Northwest women's basketball's 57-47 win over Newman Jan. 21 in Bearcat Arena. Meyer, who was one of the first county residents to be diagnosed with COVID-19, said the experience changed him for the better.

# Life after the virus

## An early COVID-19 patient, Meyer reflects on change

CALVIN SILVERS  
Sports Reporter | @Calvin\_Silvers

Northwest Missouri State University contacted the campus community March 10, 2020, informing everyone the University was going to cancel in-person classes for the remainder of the semester. The cancellation was enforced to protect the health and safety of its students and employees from the spread of COVID-19.

Less than a month later, Nodaway County had one confirmed positive case, but the individual was not a part of the Northwest body.

It seemed to be a semi-normal April day in Maryville. The weather was getting warmer, but the campus was eerily silent from the lack of students who were home and families gathered to celebrate time away from work.

Northwest women's basketball coach Austin Meyer was preparing to enjoy time away from coaching and go on a run to begin his transition to his ideal offseason body.

"I remember going for a run, and my chest started hurting a little bit; I could feel it. I didn't know if it was being out of shape — at the time I was probably 30 pounds overweight, so maybe it was just the mile run that I tried to do that made it tough," Meyer said. "I felt something different in my lungs."

However, Meyer wasn't as out of shape as he believed he was. In fact, he had no idea the seriousness of what he was about to encounter, or already had.

Later that night, Meyer began to have chills. He was sweating profusely and had trouble finding an appetite. As he sat down to watch the news, the various stories covering the rising cases of coronavirus took him to a different level of stress.

"Yeah, not really," said Meyer, who never thought he'd contract the virus. "Back then, it was just — everything was so new, and nobody really knew what to expect. At that point, my family all got together at one spot and stayed inside and tried not to go anywhere."

Despite his family's plan to avoid any spread of the coronavirus, Meyer became only the second confirmed positive COVID-19 case in Nodaway County.

"Obviously," Meyer said. "That didn't work out real well."

Meyer wasn't 100% sure he could've come in contact with anyone that had COVID-19. He recounted the one time he ventured outside his home, which involved a



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

In a file photo from the 2019-20 season, Northwest women's basketball coach Austin Meyer walks toward the locker room at halftime of a game. Meyer said recently he was close to 30 pounds overweight before being infected with COVID-19 in April 2020.

“I was almost, like, in so much fear to fall asleep that I might not wake up.”

-AUSTIN MEYER

Walgreens run in St. Joseph. To this day, Meyer has no idea where he contracted the virus.

He drove to Cameron, Missouri, where there was a drive-in testing area. After a fever accompanied the rest of his aforementioned symptoms, Meyer had to walk into his test in a suit designed to keep the health workers safe.

Meyer's wife, Kelsi Meyer, was flooded with different emotions when her husband broke the news to her.

"I was at least happy to know what was going on, because like I said, he had been so sick. The unknown — it's the fear of the unknown," Kelsi Meyer said. "Then it was like, 'Oh crap.' At that time, we didn't really know anybody who had it, and so we quarantined with my

family. Then you're thinking like, 'OK, do we just get everybody sick?' Just that concern of spreading it, unintentionally, when we thought we were doing the right things."

Not only was Austin Meyer's health at risk, but also the health of his wife and 1-year-old daughter.

"My health was last. I was definitely concerned about Austin because he was so sick. He never gets sick; that was the sickest he's been, so that was sort of freaky," Kelsi Meyer said. "Yeah, definitely our daughter, it was so early on we were like, 'How does this affect her and everybody?'"

Austin Meyer barricaded himself in his room, beginning his week of quarantine. His fever became worse;

he had no desire to eat and had to change his clothes throughout the day to battle the sporadic episodes of sweat. Seeing the death toll continue to rise across the world took a mental toll on him.

He also had trouble sleeping, including one night where he didn't get a single moment of rest.

"I think I watched The Office reruns about 50 times," Austin Meyer said. "I was almost, like, in so much fear to fall asleep that I might not wake up. I would catch myself whenever I started to go to sleep."

Kelsi Meyer saw her husband become more anxious — a personality trait she had not seen from Austin Meyer much during their relationship. It hurt her knowing she couldn't go up to her husband's room to calm him down. She would set his food on the steps up to the bedroom where he stayed, which he would pick up when he felt like eating.

It was even worse for his daughter, Mary Claire, who questioned Kelsi Meyer on why her dad would not come downstairs to play with her, or even see her.

There were a lot of unknowns for Austin Meyer, as he had only seen celebrities and athletes come down with the virus, and no further coverage on how many people were recovering. The lack of coverage on the survival rate was the scariest thing, he said.

The community came together to show support for the Northwest coach. Friends left precooked dinners and desserts at the home and sent text messages and emails of encouragement.

"I joked that after I tested negative I probably added 10 pounds eating all the cookies and everything," Austin Meyer said. "I had a bunch of support; it was great."

While contracting COVID-19 is a serious matter, the usually-sarcastic personality of Austin Meyer and his friends pushed him through a tough time. Friends sent text messages referring to him as "No. 2." He acquired this nickname after being the second person to come down with COVID-19 in the county.

For Kelsi Meyer, the support was there, but she was also faced with co-workers and friends being resilient about coming in contact with her. Kelsi Meyer, a counselor at North Andrew, said the school didn't want her name getting out, as the institution was trying to protect her from any backlash she might encounter.

FULL STORY ONLINE:  
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CALVIN SILVERS | NW MISSOURIAN

Washburn senior guard Tyler Geiman drains a buzzer-beating, game-winning shot from 55-feet away to capture a 69-68 victory over Northwest March 6 in the MIAA Tournament Championship. Geiman finished with 23 points in the contest. It marked Washburn's second win against the 'Cats this season in Bearcat Arena.

## Northwest upset by last-second prayer with MIAA Tournament title on the line

JON WALKER  
Sports Editor | @ByJonWalker

Northwest men's basketball junior guard Diego Bernard stepped to the free-throw line of the south basket inside Bearcat Arena with 2.7 seconds remaining in the Bearcats' third battle with Washburn this season.

The Ichabods won the first, an 84-82 upset in overtime against the Bearcats Jan. 7 in Maryville.

The Bearcats won the second, an 88-85 triumph in overtime Feb. 20 on the road to clinch their eighth consecutive MIAA regular season title.

When Bernard had two shots ahead of him, the game was tied at 66. He was trying to assure the Bearcats wouldn't need another extra five minutes against the Ichabods.

Northwest junior guard Trevor Hudgins blocked a go-ahead shot from Washburn's Tyler Geiman on the preceding possession, in which

Bernard was fouled.

He nailed both of them to give the Bearcats a 2-point advantage.

"(Bernard) gets to step up to the line with two seconds left, hits two clutch free throws, and then, you know, you think two dribbles, don't foul," Northwest senior forward Ryan Hawkins said. "Don't give up a full-court pass for an easy 3. Make them take something from 70 feet away, and if it goes in, I guess it goes in."

Geiman got the inbound pass, dribbled twice and heaved the ball toward the north basket of the gym. The Bearcats didn't foul, just as Hawkins envisioned it.

It was 55 feet instead of 70, but on its way down, Geiman's shot hit nothing but the net to give Washburn a 69-68 win over the No. 1 Bearcats Saturday evening in the MIAA Tournament Championship.

"That was crazy, man. I'm still shocked," Gei-

man said in the aftermath of his heroics while wearing the net he had just cut down around his neck. "Right as I shot it, I knew it definitely had a chance to go. I thought it was in, personally, but you never know."

"Probably wouldn't change a thing," said Hawkins, who was talking to a group of reporters amid Washburn's postgame celebration. "Making him throw up a prayer from the other free-throw line is a pretty good shot. Two seconds left, I don't know, probably 99% of the time that doesn't go in. ... It's March. That's part of March. Can't really do a whole lot with it."

The Bearcats (23-2) seemed out of the game for most of it, in part due to their struggles on offense. Northwest went the first 2 minutes and 45 seconds of the contest without a bucket. It didn't get any better for the 'Cats throughout the first 20 minutes, either.

Hawkins nailed a 3-pointer with less than six minutes in the first half to cut Washburn's lead to 6. The Ichabods (19-6) responded by draining two 3-pointers of their own en route to a 27-15 advantage.

SEE BUZZER | B3

## 'Cats named No. 2 in Central Region

JON WALKER  
Sports Editor | @ByJonWalker

Heading into the final week before the NCAA Division II Selection Show, a program that announces a committee's decision on each regional tournament's bracket, Northwest men's basketball was projected to be the No. 1 seed.

The Bearcats steamrolled both Emporia State and Central Oklahoma in their first two games of the MIAA Tournament. In the league's tournament championship game against Washburn, roughly 24 hours before the committee's decision was announced, Northwest endured a 69-68 loss.

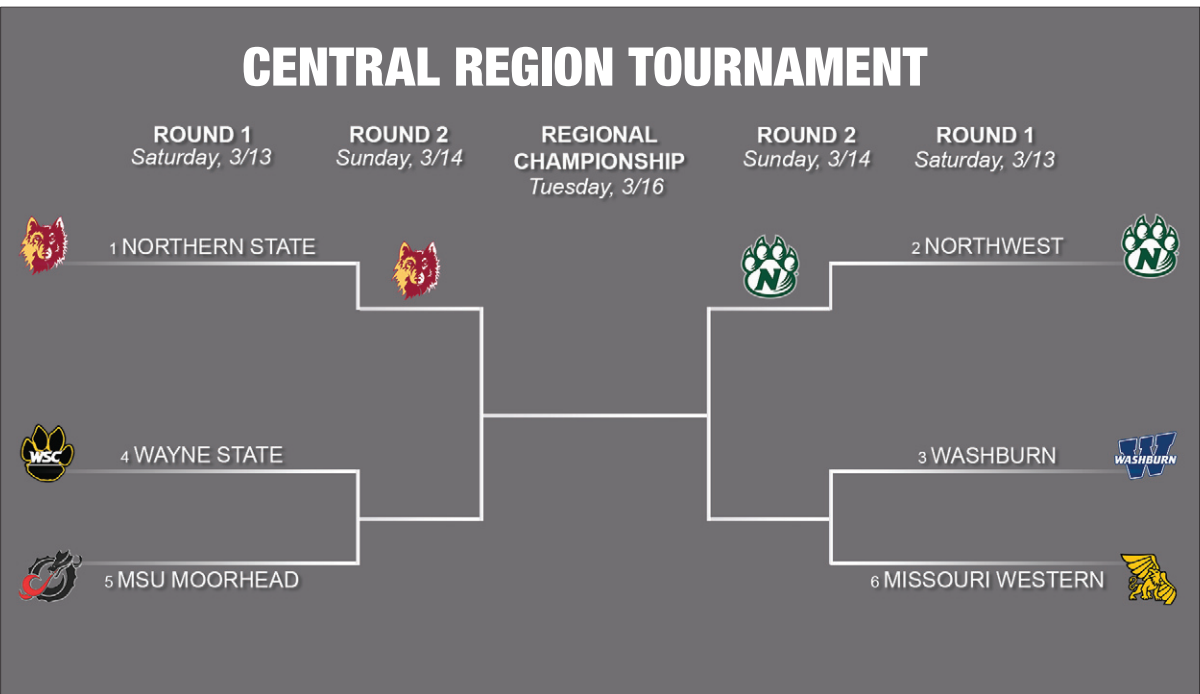
Despite the loss, which put the Bearcats at 23-2, Northwest coach Ben McCollum had a good idea of how the MIAA would be represented in the Central Region Tournament.

"I'd assume it'd be No. 1, No. 3 and No. 6, would be my guess," McCollum said in the aftermath of the Washburn loss March 6. "That'd be my guess."

McCollum was right, mostly. Missouri Western (14-10) was sixth-seeded and Washburn (19-6) was seeded third. However, Northern State — the host school for the tournament — received the No. 1 seed. Northwest was the No. 2.

"You know, it is what it is," McCollum said. "The No. 1 seed is what it is, like, there's nothing you can do to control it. ... You just kind of have to do what you do and find a way to win your first game."

With the way the six-team



JON WALKER | NW MISSOURIAN

bracket was seeded, all three schools on one side of the bracket are from the MIAA. The three schools on the other side of the bracket are all from the NSIC, the conference home to Northern (18-1), fourth-seeded Wayne State (11-6) and fifth-seeded MSU Moorhead (10-4).

Northwest will have a first-round bye and will await whichever team wins the fourth matchup this season between Western and Washburn.

"We've been playing conference games all year, so we're used to the teams we're about to play," said Northwest junior guard Trevor Hudgins, who was named the MIAA

Player of the Year. "It can go either way. They have a week to prepare, so it'll be interesting."

Washburn won the most recent matchup between the two programs with a 101-72 blowout over Western March 5 in the MIAA Tournament Semifinals. Prior to that, Western had won four consecutive matchups against the Ichabods, including two this regular season.

It doesn't matter to McCollum and Hudgins that they'll perhaps face Washburn, the team that's handed the Bearcats their only two losses this season, a fourth time this season. It also doesn't matter to

them that they'll perhaps face Western, the Bearcats' rival that hasn't beaten them in 19 games, a third time this season.

The only thing that matters to them is the chance to keep their season alive.

"Depending on whoever it is, Washburn or Western, we're working for them right now," Hudgins said. "We see what Washburn did to us last game. We know what Western does. I feel like we're preparing for both of them at this point and just trying to get better each day."

SEE TOURNEY | B3



# Hawkins tallies record statline in blowout of UCO

JON WALKER  
Sports Editor | @ByJonWalker

Ahead of Northwest men’s basketball match-up with Central Oklahoma March 5 in the MIAA Tournament Semifinals, a triple-double had never been recorded in the 40 years of the league’s postseason tournament.

When that game concluded, there was one: Northwest senior forward Ryan Hawkins.

Hawkins tallied 30 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists in the Bearcats’ 104-72 win against the Bronchos Friday evening in Bearcat Arena.

“That was pretty impressive. I mean, he was pretty impressive,” Northwest coach Ben McCollum said in the aftermath of the Bearcats’ blowout. “He’s got a lot of people on him, so he was able to find some people today, which is really nice. We were able to knock down a few shots.”

Hawkins’ historic performance was an outlier not only in the MIAA Tournament but the Northwest men’s program as well. The forward is only the second Bearcat to record a triple-double, and the first to do so since Jan. 25, 2020, when then-sophomore guard Trevor Hudgins did it against Fort Hays inside of Bearcat Arena.

“As (Hudgins) said, to quote Talladega Nights, ‘If you’re not first, you’re last,’” Hawkins said through a laugh. “Trevor had the first one, so.”



The beatdown of the Bronchos (13-11) marked the 12th 30-point performance of Hawkins’ career, the second time in as many games in which the Bearcats have put up at least 100 points and Northwest’s 16th appearance in the conference’s title game — the most in MIAA Tournament history.

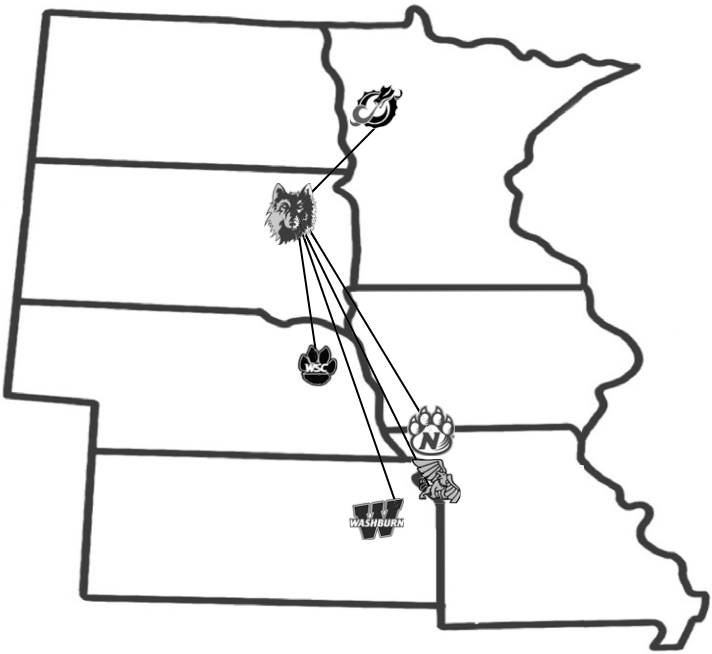
Hawkins combined with Hudgins to score 59 points in the contest, marking the 49th 20-point performance of Hudgins’ career. The junior guard hit a layup with a little less than 12 minutes remaining in the first half, one that moved him by Victor Coleman for No. 3 on the program’s all-time scoring list. “Pretty slow day for him, I’d say. 29? Jeepers, Trevor,” Hawkins said with a smile. “I mean, we don’t see Trevor with 30 at the end of the year, something feels off.”

All of Hudgins’ 29 points didn’t come as easy as his 71% mark from the field shows. Of course, some baskets were easier than others, but most resembled the fadeaway shot he sank nearly midway through the second half.

Hudgins spent the last 15 seconds of the shot clock with the ball in his possession, trying to find enough space to score a bucket or set up a teammate to do so. There was one second on the shot clock when the ball left his hands. There wasn’t any time left when it found the bottom of the net.

“I mean, it kind of took me back to watching Kobe as a little kid. Back down, then two dribbles,

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MAKAYLA POLAK | NW MISSOURIAN

fadeaway,” Hawkins said. “He’s gonna hit the shots. ... It’s so nice to have two guards in Diego (Bernard) and Trevor that can just make anything happen with five seconds left on the shot clock. It seems like an eternity with those two, and normally it’s like, ‘Alright, we had to get a shot up,’ but those two just take their time, and they get the look they want.”

“It’s hard to rattle him,” McCollum said of Hudgins, the MIAA Player of the Year. “It just excites him more. He’s just so calm and steady. You start talking to him, it just gets him more excited, and he doesn’t ever show it.”

The duo of Hawkins and Hudgins personified the dominance Northwest demonstrated for the entirety of the contest. In the Bearcats’ win against Emporia State in the tournament’s quarterfinals March 3, they recorded the largest half-

time margin in MIAA Tournament history (41).

If they hadn’t set the record then, they would’ve against the Bronchos. Northwest carried a 58-26 lead into the half, which would’ve been a single point more than the record if they hadn’t broken it two days prior.

The Bearcats have set a new season high in points in back-to-back games. There was a point in the season McCollum felt as if there wasn’t enough rhythm on offense from his team. Hawkins thought that, too.

Now, it’s the complete opposite. “I think we’re just starting to find our rhythm offensively,” Hawkins said. “Before, I’d say we kind of got stuck and went to one or two things that were working and just, like, stayed with it. We didn’t flow offensively; we were scoring off of the actions, not in just our

motion. ... I just think we move so well offensively now.”

This is where the Bearcats expected to be, though.

They expected to be in the MIAA Tournament Championship — it’s the expectation they’ve set during the last decade of McCollum’s tenure. All season, they’ve said they take everyone’s best shot. In all but one game this season, the Bearcats were able to handle it.

McCollum thinks the Bearcats are finally starting to return the favor.

“The benefit is — like we talked about all year — that we take your best shot, but this is when that pays off,” McCollum said. “Because we’re used to championship-type games because every game is a championship for everybody else. Well, now it is for us, too. So, now we are playing our championship, along with the same thing that they’ve been doing to us all year.”

# The best of Ben McCollum, told through reporter’s eyes

ANDREW WEGLEY  
Managing Editor  
@andrewwegley



At first, this story was meant to be a list, essentially — an assortment of facts I gathered from two full seasons of interviews and press conferences with Northwest men’s basketball coach Ben McCollum, as he and Northwest get set to enter another Division II Central Region Tournament.

But then I thought, “Is that really what people need to know? That Coach Mac is from Storm Lake, Iowa — God’s country, he calls it — and drinks his coffee black and checked himself into the hospital

once in college to get an IV so he wouldn’t have to tell the trainers he was sick and sit out of a practice?”

The obvious answer is no. People don’t really need to know anything more about Coach Mac, I guess. But if they’re going to know something, it should be something more than a list of assorted facts that might make his Wikipedia page one day. They should get the not-all-that-behind-the-scenes look that I got for two years as a reporter, and so, in a few anecdotes, this is what that is.

This disclaimer here is that I only covered McCollum for two years, adding some press conferences here and there this season when I served largely just as a photographer on the men’s basketball beat. We’ve never talked for more

than 30 minutes at a time. I can’t really even pretend to know him well, but the following stories paint the clearest picture of what I think the real Coach Mac is like.

It’s somewhat well-documented how competitive McCollum is. He ran a 5K in fall 2019 and took fourth. He ran another one this spring and finished fourth again. He wasn’t beat, in either of them, by anyone older than him, nor by anyone who was that close to his own age.

I’m not sure I’ve ever encountered someone who wants to win as much as he does. I asked him once, off-hand in a press conference, if he was the most competitive person he knew. “Yeah,” he said.

Last football season, in 2019, as Northwest was in the midst of playoff run, I had started wearing a sweatshirt with a cardinal on it. I had picked it up at a thrift store in St. Joseph because I thought it was ridiculous and it was, like, \$3. I wore it to the next week’s press conference and it grew into an icon, somehow.

Rich Wright, Northwest’s head football coach, was sure the sweater had luck. It was there in Hays, Kansas, when the Bearcats put together a 17-point comeback and won on a field goal in overtime. It was there at Bearcat Stadium when they stomped the previously-undefeated UCM Mules. He wanted me to keep wearing it, politely and subtly suggesting that I keep packing it.

McCollum was a little more adamant. After his team had beaten William Jewell by more than 40 points in late November, just days before Northwest football’s first-round playoff game, McCollum’s post-game press conference had deteriorated into something less than a press conference. There were few serious questions being asked and even fewer serious answers being given.

After Mac lectured me on biology because I’d asked about his receding hairline — hair comes up more often than it should with Mac — he quizzed me about my attire for the upcoming weekend.

“You wearing the bird sweater this weekend for football?” McCollum asked me after we’d told him we were out of questions.

“Yeah, I mean, Rich kind of wants me to, and it’s tough because I don’t want to be biased,” I said. “But also, like, if Rich Wright asks you to wear a sweater ...”

“Did he ask you to wear it this next weekend?” Mac asked.

“He asked me at the presser (on a Tuesday), he was like, ‘Where’s



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

**Coach Ben McCollum directs his players in the second half of Northwest’s semifinal win over UCO March 5 in the MIAA Tournament. Two days before the game, McCollum was named MIAA Coach of the Year for the seventh season in a row.**

the sweater?” I said. “And I was like, ‘I can’t wear it twice a week every week. I’ve got to do laundry. So, I did laundry today.’”

“You can wear it twice a week,” McCollum said, and we all engaged in a minute-long discussion about how often you should wash sweatshirts and how often thrift stores restock their racks and how often you should do laundry and whether Mac washes his tie. (He doesn’t — but he washes everything else after one wear).

The conversation, as it tends to with Mac, had trailed pretty far off course. So, McCollum brought it back to what he thought was most important.

“You better wear that damn cardinal thing,” McCollum said. “Just wear the bird shirt this weekend — that’s all I ask.”

I can’t imagine what his assistants and players hear on the bench in the middle of close games. And I think the closest I’ve really gotten

to that was at that Northwest football playoff game, when Mac and one of his sons were watching from behind the north end zone as Harding was attempting a 2-point conversion while trailing Northwest 7-6 late in the fourth quarter of the first-round matchup.

After complimenting my sweatshirt, he looked at the field and yelled, “Let’s get this sh—!” He said it with the same animation he possesses on his own sideline. Then he looked at me and said “Sorry,” and I assured him that it was OK.

I turned back to the field. Harding ran an unsuccessful rush to the left. Northwest’s defense essentially sealed the first-round victory with that stop. I tried to get some photos of the play and ensuing celebration, and by the time I turned back to gauge Mac’s thoughts, he and his son were walking out the stadium’s east gate.

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Sophomore forward Luke Waters carries the ball past Emporia State sophomore Tyreek Robinson in their MIAA Tournament March 5. Northwest took a 20-5 lead in the first five minutes.

WALK THE TALK:

# Could NW beat 'Bods in a fourth matchup?

JON WALKER  
Sports Editor  
@ByJonWalker



After a one-week hiatus, I’m back. Welcome to Walk The Talk, the (almost) weekly mailbag column where I answer your questions regarding anything Northwest Athletics. However, with Northwest men’s basketball heading to the NCAA Division II Central Region Tournament this weekend, this week’s edition will focus solely on Ben McCollum and the Bearcats.

Could we see a fourth Northwest vs. Washburn matchup this season?

Yes, we absolutely could. However, I’m not sure if we will. Northwest’s 69-68 loss to Washburn in the MIAA Tournament Championship game was apparently enough to slip the Bearcats (23-2) behind Northern State (18-1). Apparently, five extra wins don’t make up for one loss, which came courtesy of a 55-foot buzzer-beater in Bearcat Arena. Washburn’s Tyler Geiman, who made the aforementioned shot, propelled Northern ahead of the Bearcats for the Central Region’s No. 1 seed. Now, the second-seeded Bearcats will have a first-round bye and await the winner of the matchup between No. 3 seed Washburn and No. 6 seed Missouri Western. Yes, I’m talking about the Central Region Tournament and not the MIAA Tournament. Don’t rule out the Griffons, though. Washburn beat Western 101-72 March 5 in the MIAA Tournament Semifinals, but Western was without starting guard Tyrell Carroll, who is expected to be ready by the game March 13. Prior to that meeting, the Griffons had won four straight against the Ichabods, including two matchups this regular season. So, yes, we could absolutely get another edition of Northwest vs. Washburn, by far the best matchup in the MIAA, but don’t be surprised if we don’t.

How do you feel about the committee having the MIAA teams on one side of the bracket and the NSIC teams on the other?

It’s only a six-team bracket this year. If you couldn’t tell from the previous question, all three of the MIAA teams that made it will be on one side of the bracket. All three of the NSIC teams that made the Central Region Tournament will be on the other side of the bracket. Nobody really knew we’d get a smaller version of conference tournaments. In the aftermath of the Bearcats’

latest loss to Washburn, Northwest coach Ben McCollum still thought the MIAA would be represented as the No. 1, No. 2 and No. 6 seeds. That, of course, didn’t happen. My Twitter replies were filled with Northwest fans questioning the committee’s decision, and I don’t blame them either. It’s not right. After hitting that game-winning shot to beat Northwest, Tyler Geiman said he wanted to play the Bearcats with a trip to the Elite Eight on the line. That’s exactly how it should be, too. So, I was pretty confused. I wanted to see the two best teams meet in the finals of this weekend’s tournament, not the semifinals.

Do you think Northern State is a better team than Washburn?

No. The MIAA is, by far, the best conference in Division II athletics. Washburn (19-6) has been through the wringer this year in terms of competition, yet still managed a way to beat Northwest twice while the Bearcats were No. 1 in Division II. Northern State is good; I’m not taking anything away from the Wolves, who finished with 18 wins and one lone loss this season. Northern won the NSIC regular season title, along with the conference’s postseason tournament. If you put Northern in the MIAA, the Wolves would’ve probably had a similar season to Missouri Southern and Western this season, both teams that finished the regular season 13-9. Once again, that’s nothing against Northern, more so a testament to how tough the MIAA is. However, should Northern and Washburn make it to the finals of the Central Region Tournament, I’ll take the Ichabods to upset the Wolves on their home court.

If Northwest and Washburn were to meet up for the fourth time this season, who do you think would come out on top?

I’ve been pretty spot on with predictions like this for when people ask them, though I have to admit that I was wrong on the last prediction I made when I said that Northwest would win the third matchup with Washburn. Northwest, offensively, had one of its worst halves of basketball since 2015 during the third matchup. The Bearcats battled back in the second half and probably should’ve won if it weren’t for Geiman’s miracle shot. If the Bearcats played even 10 minutes of the first half as they did the entirety of the second, they probably would’ve won by double digits. They didn’t, though, and I’m aware of that. Still, I’ve got the Bearcats in the fourth matchup. It’d just make sense, right? Washburn won the first. Northwest won the second. The Ichabods took the third. The Bearcats will take the fourth. If the two programs meet again, when it’s win or go home, it’ll be one of the best college basketball games this season. Period. *Walk The Talk is a mailbag that focuses on all things Northwest Athletics. To submit a question for the next edition of the mailbag, tweet @ByJonWalker or email j.walker.missourian@gmail.com.*

## BUZZER

CONTINUED FROM B1

“I didn’t think we came out very ready in the first half,” Northwest coach Ben McCollum said. “Just, just didn’t, just — terrible, honestly. I think we thought it was going to be easy, and it’s not. It is what it is.” The Ichabods took a 30-19 lead into the half. It was the fifth time Northwest has trailed at the break this season. In the four games prior, the Bearcats were 3-1. Of course, the lone loss was the aforementioned one to Washburn roughly two months ago. The 11-point deficit was a rarity for the Bearcats. They shot 23.1% from the field during the first half, including 14.3% from beyond the arc. Northwest scored a combined 118 first-half points in its quarterfinal and semifinal games. The Bearcats’ 19-point first half was the fewest points they’ve scored since March 17, 2015, when they endured a 47-42 loss to MSU Moorhead in the final game of the Central Region Tournament. “It’s like we went away from everything we’ve been doing,” McCollum said. “It just wasn’t a good half. Probably the worst half of basketball that we’ve played all season.” Washburn guard Jalen Lewis had a game-high 15 points at the

break, including a clip of 3 of 5 from deep. He eventually finished with 26, but his first half set up the would’ve-been career high if he hadn’t set it the night before with 29 in the Ichabods’ 101-72 win against Missouri Western. Lewis’ success was reflective of the rest of the first half for the Ichabods, who collectively shot 52% from the field and 50% from 3-point land. “We were terrible defensively to start,” McCollum said. “A couple of times, we didn’t know who we were guarding. ... I don’t know what was going on in that first half.” The Bearcats rallied back, and Hawkins eventually tied the game at 50 with a little less than seven minutes in the second half. He finished with 23 points and 10 rebounds, marking the 28th double-double of his career. It was also his 41st 20-point performance. Northwest led by as many as 4 points with more than five minutes in the contest. Both teams traded buckets throughout the final five minutes, though, including the final one from Washburn. After not trailing for a single second in their other two MIAA Tournament games, the Bearcats trailed for more than 32 minutes against the Ichabods. “In a way, it was a lot more fun

today,” Hawkins said, “Just got all of the competitive juices flowing.” The Bearcats will now turn their attention to the Central Region Tournament, which will take place March 13-16 in Aberdeen, South Dakota. It doesn’t matter that Washburn ended the Bearcats’ 18-game winning streak. It wouldn’t have helped them next weekend anyway. It doesn’t matter that Washburn halted the Bearcats from winning their sixth consecutive, 10th overall, MIAA Tournament title. It wouldn’t have helped them next weekend anyway. And it doesn’t matter that Washburn has bested the Bearcats two times in three meetings this season. It won’t help either team next weekend anyway. “This isn’t our season,” Hawkins said in the aftermath of the loss. “Now we’ve got a week to prepare for regionals, and I feel like after every time we’ve played Washburn we start playing really good afterward, so that’s one positive to come out of this.” “We’ve got a regional to compete in; it’s not the end of the world,” McCollum said. “We’re still conference regular season champions. ... We’ll be the No. 1 seed in the national tournament, and you’ve gotta go try and win that now.”



Junior guard Diego Bernard leaps with the ball in the second half of the Northwest men’s 100-61 MIAA Tournament quarterfinal victory over visiting Emporia State in Bearcat Arena. Bernard did not miss a shot and notched 18 points, nine rebounds, four steals and two assists.

## TOURNEY

CONTINUED FROM B1

In the Bearcats’ latest loss to Washburn, they played their worst offensive half of basketball since 2015. Throughout the first 20 minutes of action, Northwest mustered 19 points and shot 23% from the field, including 14% from beyond the arc. The Bearcats shot 60% or better from the field in the four games prior to that one. It was an uncharacteristic game for Northwest, yet a second-half surge from the Bearcats helped the matchup live up to the expectations the prior two had set. In their first meeting Jan. 7 in Bearcat Arena, then-No. 5 seed Washburn needed overtime to beat then-No. 1 seed Northwest 84-82. In their second meeting Feb. 20 in Topeka, Kansas, Northwest

needed overtime to beat Washburn 88-85. The win clinched the Bearcats’ eighth straight outright MIAA regular season title. In the latest, Washburn needed a buzzer-beating, game-winning shot from 55-feet away to beat the Bearcats. “It’s gonna be a battle,” Hudgins said about a possible fourth meeting with Washburn. “Everyone saw how the last game played out. They killed us in the first half. We came back in the second half, but I feel like next time around it’s gonna be an interesting game; it’s gonna be very intense. It’s probably gonna be one of the best games of the year, I think.” Should the Ichabods beat Western in the first round, McCollum knows the fourth matchup will be similar to the first three. “I mean, postseason ones are usually pretty close games,” Mc-

Collum said. “So, yeah, you just have to expect that from everyone you play.” Hudgins is excited to face a familiar opponent, though. He’s not concerned with what team he’ll face again this season. He’s hoping to get the opportunity to face whichever team comes out of the top part of the bracket, and he’s hoping to get that opportunity with a trip to the NCAA Division II Elite Eight on the line. He knows what stands in his way of doing that, though, which is two teams he has plenty of experience against. “We just are getting so used to each other that I feel like this next game, whoever we may play — Western or Washburn — it’s going to be very intense,” Hudgins said. “We’re going to be very focused. It’s win or go home now. So, the fight is on.”





ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

Coach Ben McCollum claps in the second half of Northwest’s semifinal win over Central Oklahoma in the MIAA Tournament March 5. McCollum was named MIAA Coach of the Year March 3.



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

Junior guard Trevor Hudgins dribbles toward the rim for a breakaway layup in Northwest men’s basketball’s 104-72 win over Central Oklahoma March 5 in the MIAA Tournament semifinals.

# Bearcats fall to Washburn, look ahead

JON WALKER  
Sports Editor | @ByJonWalker

Northwest men’s basketball was hoping to secure its sixth straight and 10th overall MIAA Tournament heading into the final week of the season before the Central Region Tournament.

The Bearcats started their run toward hoisting another trophy with a 100-61 win over Emporia State March 3 in Bearcat Arena.

Prior to that game, Northwest junior guards Trevor Hudgins and Diego Bernard were named the MIAA Player of the Year and MIAA Defensive Player of the Year, respectively. Coach Ben McCollum was named the MIAA Coach of the Year, too, marking the eighth time he’s been recognized as the league’s best coach.

After they stung the Hornets, the Bearcats were set to face fifth-seeded Central Oklahoma in the semifinals. Northwest continued its dominance en route to the Bearcats’ 16th MIAA Tournament appearance with a 104-72 beatdown of the Bronchos March 5 in Bearcat Arena.

It set up the third meeting between Northwest and Washburn this season with the tournament’s title on the line. The Ichabods won the first matchup, an 84-82 win in overtime Jan. 7 in Bearcat Arena. The Bearcats won the second, an 88-85 win in overtime Feb. 20 in Topeka, Kansas.

The Bearcats thought they won the third, too, as they led 68-66 with 2.7 seconds left.

Washburn guard Tyler Geiman nailed a 55-foot shot at the buzzer to defeat No. 1 Northwest 69-68 March 6 in Bearcat Arena.

Northwest will now turn its attention to the Central Region Tournament March 13-16 in Aberdeen, South Dakota.



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

Junior guard Diego Bernard shoots a fadeaway midrange jumper over Washburn’s Jace Williams March 6 in Northwest’s 69-68 loss to Washburn in the MIAA Tournament Championship. Bernard scored 10 points in the game, only the third loss of his career.



ANDREW WEGLEY | NW MISSOURIAN

Senior forward Ryan Hawkins converts a layup in Northwest’s semifinal victory over Central Oklahoma March 5 in the MIAA Tournament. With 30 points, 11 boards and 11 assists versus UCO, Hawkins tallied the first triple-double in the tournament’s history.



JON WALKER | NW MISSOURIAN

From left, graduate assistant Dray Starzl and players Ryan Hawkins, Luke Waters, Trevor Hudgins and Byron Williams celebrate Northwest’s blowout 100-61 win over Emporia State March 3.